Prices of wheat

992.SHRI EKANATH K.THAKUR: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that his Ministry has deliberately ignored higher domestic demand for wheat this year and instead of ensuring more supply, it has attempted to reduce demand by raising prices of wheat;

(b) whether it is a fact that Government have purchased less amount of wheat *i.e.* less than one million tonne of wheat, as against 3.9 million tonnes of wheat bought last year;

(c) if so, the reasons therefor; and

(d) the steps Government propose to take to arrest the spiralling prices of wheat?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SUBHASH MAHARIA): (a) Government has not made any upward revision in the Central Issue Prices (CIPs) of wheat supplied from the Central Pool. The CIPs have been retained at the same level fro BPL families w.e.f. July, 2000 and for APL families from July, 2002.

(b) and (c) During the current Rabi Marketing Season 2003-04, 158.02 lakh tonnes of wheat was procured in the country as against 190.25 lakh tonnes procured during the previous Rabi Marketing Season 2002-2003. Less procurement was on account of decrease in production due to drought conditions.

(d) The open market prices of wheat are stable. Government is also operating the Open Market Sale Scheme (Domestic) for wheat to ensure comfortable availability of wheat to consumers.

Diversion of Government supply to open market

993. SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that unscrupulous ration dealers deprive the Antyodaya Ration Card holders, or similar other economically

backward PDS beneficiaries by diverting Government supplies to open market at higher rates;

(b) if so, whether any specific complaints against the ration dealers and regarding stiff resistance from officials of the Food and Supplies Department have been received from Non-Governmental Organisations; and

(c) what steps Government are taking to ensure that economically backward, tribals and adivasi beneficiaries get the entitlement of rations at fixed Government rates?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI SUBHASH MAHARIA): (a) and (b) The Public Distribution System (PDS) is operated under the joint responsibility of the Central and State Governments. The Central Government is responsible for the procurement and transportation of foodgrains up to the Principal Distribution Centres of the Food Corporation of India whild the State Governments are responsible for the identification of families living Below the Poverty Line, the issue of Rations Cards and distribution of foodgrains to the beneficiaries through Fair Price Shops.

The Public Distribution System (Control) Order, 2001 has been issued on 31st August, 2001 under Section 3 of the Essential Commodities Act, 1955 with a view to curb willful adulteration, substitution, diversion etc.

(c) In order to ensure availability of foodgrains to the poorest of the poor the Antyodaya Anna Yojana (AAY) has been launched by the Government on 25th December, 2000. The scheme provides foodgrains at Rs. 2 a Kg. for wheat and Rs. 3 a Kg. for rice. The scheme has been expanded in June, 2003 to cover an additional 50 lakh Below Poverty Line (BPL) families from amongst the following categories:

(i) Households headed by widows or terminally ill persons or disabled persons or persons aged 60 years or more with no assured means of subsistence or societal support.

(ii) Widows or terminally ill persons or disabled persons or persons aged 60 years or more or single women or single men with no family or societal support or assured means of subsistence.

(iii) All primitive tribal households.

Closure of sugar mills in Uttar Pradesh

†994. PROF. M.M. AGARWAL: Will the Minister of CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION be pleased to state:

(a) the number of sugar mills which have already been closed down in Uttar Pradesh alongwith the number of mills which are on the verge of closure;

(b) the outstanding arrears of sugarcane dues to be paid to the growers by both the closed mills as well as those still operating alongwith the reasons for non-payment thereof; and

(c) the policy adopted by Government in this regard in order to safeguard interests of the farmers?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS, FOOD AND PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION (SHRI V. SREENIVASA PRASAD): (a) As per the information available in the Directorate of Sugar, nine sugar mills in Uttar Pradesh remained closed during the last five years sugar seasons. In addition twelve sugar mills remained closed for one or more seasons during the previous five sugar seasons.

(b) The total cane price arrears of sugar mills of Uttar Pradesh including closed ones, as on 31.10.2003 was Rs. 37849.06 lacs. The reasons for non-payment of dues may be inadequate generation/ availability of fund, high cost of production, inadequate sales realization, uneconomic size of the plant, old and obsolete plant & machinery etc.

(c) The responsibility for ensuring timely payment of cane price dues lies with the State Governments, which have necessary powers and field organizations to enforce such payments. The Central Government, on its part, besides writing to the Chief Ministers of

†Original notice of trie question was received in Hindi.